

23.04.12

I am making this submission as the Sierra Leone Hon. Consul to Ireland, but I think it is relevant to most of the smaller countries in sub Saharan Africa because the problems faced by Sierra Leone are typical of those faced by many other countries in the region and throughout Africa.

I worked in Sierra Leone in the mid '70's. Twelve years after Independence It was still a reasonably well functioning country.

The education system functioned well and it was run and paid for by the government. The Health system also functioned albeit a lower level.

Sierra Leone was a net food exporter. The roads and general infrastructure was maintained by the SL Government.

The first years of independence (1961) were good in Sierra Leone as they were for many African countries. The GDP per head in Kenya was higher than South Korea in 1961.

By 1990, before the Civil War started in Sierra Leone, the infrastructure had crumbled, the state had ceased to function. The raison d'être of the state was seen to be the enrichment of those individuals who could get their hands on power.

Over the preceding years much aid had been given to SL but the actual functioning of government was regarded as being outside the remit of the Donor Countries.

I don't want to go on stating the obvious but Governance, the rule of law and by extension Human Rights must be central to any aid programme. Otherwise we become like Sisyphus.

Working in these areas does not require huge money, but it does require active partnership and mentoring between governments and more especially between government departments and other state institutions such as Universities and Development Agencies such as the IDA, IPA, ESRI etc.

I believe Ireland is well placed to undertake this role as Sierra Leone are of similar size and population so our government departments are of a similar scale, Ireland's impact in a similarly sized country can be very significant.

Perhaps we should narrow our focus, do less but do it better.

Joe Manning

Sierra Leone Hon. Consul to Ireland.